FIELD

The Red Man's Fact.

Greeting from Niagara Falls, N. Y.

The White Man's Fancy.

FIELD

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EDITORS *Stuart Friebert*
David Young

ASSOCIATE EDITORS *Patricia Ikeda*
David St. John
Alberta Turner

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT *Beth Tornes*

COVER *Steve Farkas*

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Laura Jensen

AS THE WINDOW DARKENS

As the window darkens, as the light yearns
over the couch, as the plants drift like swans,
this is a silent poem. It will not flower
in water like a party favor, nor
will it bleed like the universe. It will
be the knot of wood that looks like a rabbit.
A knot of wood tense and growing stiffer.

The window darkens to mirror. It chimes
the reflection and what it should have been.
Have the trees and antennas seen this
blot for years, pumping like a gauge?
No wonder the birds flew away, crying out.

It is not true that the beautiful
are always false and the ugly philosophical.
But the clumsy stand as surely as the deft
at dark windows, knowing they have been deceived.
This is unbearable because we know
we see a door closing and we wait to see
that door close in our dreams, shutting us out.

How many years can come as gently as lamplight
out of the wind, each year with its own place
and the circle it made around a friend?
What the world likes is a bootstrap and locket,
work and sentiment ebbing with the light.

The ocean is a sigh at night, a dark vase
of flowers before a dark window, salt water,
someone pouring it from an abalone shell
when it first was made. It goes on forever,
a fountain, a fortuneteller in the palm of sand.
The ocean is a dish of water carried by a woman,
where the worry of our lives lies down.

NIGHT TYPEWRITER SOUNDS

(*ormbunke* is a Swedish word for fern)

They sneak through the carpet, thin stems
of invisible wire. I must get up.
The *ormbunke* hums all in silence.
Its lummox clay pot damp to sweat stands cold
in a pie plate crusted with foil,
a silver boot with a ruffle, sweet to the pen.
Stubborn but sweet. The aloe's thick bud
does not open, has no kind of stem
and no thorn. It grows formally, dark tie,
without adrenalin or terror.
The wandering jew must be taken along,
its root furring lush in the cutting
no more than a week or so old. I must get up
without slippers to join difference.
I do not know. I am not certain.
One day I put my smart head out the door
and saw I could leave in five directions.
This is an odd house. For all we know
there is a gray thief hiding on the roof,
spreading like weather on the shingles.

WINTER EVENING POEM

I remember how I came here
unraveling.
The words find a believer
and skate idly
on the frozen pond of his surface.

The ocean is given to night —
night, blue as mussel shell.
The lamp post in its quiet habit
spills light onto nothing below it.
There are no stars. We are all safe
in something better than ourselves.

The winter reached a tide
and the night was hidden
behind each winter tree
looking shy and biting its lips.
Wearing a heavy coat,
the believer holds fast.

He is night's hope,
within it a hundred false springs
that are the scent of moist
brilliantine,
the sight of a limber muscle,
the light of the moon
that was last sighted
barking down the door.

A twig snaps.
Though we kneel to no stick
and fall to no knee
wouldn't you run
from what seems like a crack in the land
from a place that will not mend for you?

PATIENCE IS A LEVELING THING

Patience is a leveling thing.
You want to lie down
until the weather clears.
The green wall, smoked to mesh,
has its subtleties. Short words
go up hills with dust.
The patience of the line
is patience in theory.
Farms aren't without it.
Bored is the farmer,
and drawn in the jaw,
while children have dynasties crashing.
He steps into different ground.
The slats are not the same;
the shade is different,
a tedious difference — like sickness,
maybe. Patience. Long words
have long lives of their own.

JOHNSON BROTHERS LTD.

Back then, my father still big,
dangerous tools bulging his pockets,
a strong smell of tow and lead in his suits,
behind his eyes the incomprehensible
world of a man, a first-class pipe-fitter
said mother. How different I must have felt
back then when he closed the doors
on her and on me.

Now he is dead, and I am suddenly as old
as he, to my amazement decay was built
into him, too. Among his notes I find
appointments with strangers, on his wall
calendars with a maze of beautiful gaspipes,
on the mantelpiece the portrait of a woman
in Paris, his wife, the incomprehensible
world of a man.

Looking in the little porcelain sink
from the Thirties with the two clumsy lions
holding up their shield: Johnson Brothers Ltd.,
high up in the still house the sad shuffle
of mother: Jesus Christ, father, tears
for now and for then, they flow
together in the lead goose-neck where
I can't tell them any longer from the drops
from the little brass tap marked Cold.

"Above the Hay . . ."

Above the hay the farmer is hanging among
the beams. The farmer's wife lies naked
in the snow.

Under the warm fleece of the roof, in vain
the pig was waiting to be slopped
and slaughtered.

What happened? This is terrible, this is
a poem, in which the farmer, his wife and
the pig

die. Warmth is like an empty nest
in winter. I am the cat in this house.
They're gone.

But I love the place where I was lying.

"Spring, now everything comes back to me"

Spring, now everything comes back to me
I see the horse again, too, lying down,
legs stretched out, as if she were dead,
with wheels, and the grey
bulging belly from which a crow
picks hair and down for her nest.

translated from the Dutch by
Ria Leigh-Loohuizen

HORSE HEAD SWAMP

A canoe before dawn along dense reeds
nosing in, looking for a way in,
for breaks of moon inside the swamp.
There's one — how far does it go in?

Paddle and glide, paddle and glide.
Reeds swish the hull. Webs of bugs
drone as they come apart. Logs thud.

They surface and breathe. I tunnel
the reeds, pull in off big handfuls,
scrape bottom, pull on my mucky breath.

I'm mud high in the dense fat of swamp.
Still I'm looking in. Drag the canoe,
ease out again. Try to sit in the middle
of open water. Still I'm looking in.

TIME OF MUD

The land bloats on the rain. Roads split. All things
loose are shed. Trucks park on planks. Mailboxes move.
Up mountains the mud goes, colors up the mountains.
The hope is wind, March wind that gets in under
clouds. April and still no wind. Night rain falls
on the rain of the day clattering. Walk the house,
puff up windows, I'm out the front door with a howl
and the dogs sprawl the mud. On to the field
falling in and stuck crooked. I take off my boots,
take off everything, slide down a bank feet up, ride
it again. The smoothed run shines. My mud body
shines. I make a mud woman. Give her light grasses,
sail her on the mud stream, float her down
into woods. She rolls in shadow and the rain
sounds in the trees like a delicate eating. I catch
a fleck of mud on my tongue. I'm crying on my tongue.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Evidently, this was needed. Because people need
to be screamed at with proof. . .
Still, he imagined Martha and Mary
standing beside him. They would
believe he *could* do it. But no one believed,
every one of them said: Lord,
you come too late.
And he went with them to do what is not done
to nature, to its sleep.
In anger. His eyes half closed
he asked them the way to the grave. He wept.
A few thought they noticed his tears,
and out of sheer curiosity hurried behind.
Even to walk the road there seemed monstrous
to him: an enactment, a test!
A high fever broke out inside him, contempt
for their insistence on what they called
their Death-, their Being Alive. . .
and loathing flooded his body
when he bitterly cried: Move the stone!
By now he must stink, someone suggested
(he'd already lain there four days) — but he
stood it, erect, filled with that gesture
which rose through him, ponderously
raising his hand — (a hand never lifted
itself so slowly, or more)
to its full height, shining
an instant in air . . . then clenching
in on itself, suddenly, like a claw, aghast
at the thought *all* the dead might return
from that tomb, where the enormous cocoon of
the corpse was beginning to stir.

However, only the one decrepit man appeared
at the entrance . . . and they saw
how their vague and inaccurate
life made room for him once more.

translated by Franz Wright

LEFT-HANDED POEM

Look at your left hand,
clenching the light.

At night it draws pictures
of all it would like

to enjoy, a rock, a face, a flower,
and it heaves them into your sleep

like notes in a bottle:
Open me, read me.

Now look at your right hand,
slower, more gentle,

open for all
it would like to forgive.

Deep in the ovens of sleep,
your left hand is pounding

its terror into loaves
and your right hand is blessing them.

HOW THE HEN SOLD HER EGGS TO THE STINGY PRIEST

An egg is a grand thing for a journey.

It will make you a small meal on the road
and a shape most serviceable to the hand

for darning socks, and for barter
a purse of gold opens doors anywhere.

If I wished for a world better than this one
I would keep, in an egg till it was wanted,

the gold earth floating on a clear sea.
If I wished for an angel, that would be my way,

the wings in gold waiting to wake,
the feet in gold waiting to walk,

and the heart that no one believed in
beating and beating the gold alive.

THE CHILD . THE RING . THE ROAD .

But where are we going? you ask.

To deliver your pain, I answer,
and to make you a new one.
The first we call sickness,

the second healing.
Why won't you feed me? you ask.
And where are my clothes?

Nobody eats on the way
and you wear what they give you,
I answer, the same for all.

You put on your crackerjack ring.
You put on the power
of its ruby-eyed pirate

and his skull-scarred flag.
It is my flag too, I whisper.
How the road shines at night!

One by one you blow out the stars
and now you are counting the doors
to your room, and two women

unfold a gown like a napkin
and truss you into its folds.
Who are those women? you ask.

They are appointed to watch you.
Even at night you are never alone.
I sleep with my eyes open, you say.

They will shut them for you, I answer,
and I slide the ring from your finger
while they wind your body in sails,

sparing only your face, bright cup,
but someone is drinking the light away.
My hand on the shape of your arm,

I walk, you ride, you are the guest.
Goodbye, I say, when we touch the door
which blinks to receive you

into its corridors, green, so green,
you have glided into a stem.
Now the lights of that sky have found you.

Now its gardens are sealing your sleep.

BONES, SCALES, ETC.

Praise FISH
cold as catacombs,
sign

of light
under the waves
glazing this beach.

Praise *trout*,
chained mouth to mouth

on a pine plank.
Grasping the leader
an old man slices

her side
as if he were shearing
a breast

and lifts her branchy
spine
from the white sky
that held it.
I hold my son's hand.

His small bones move
like kittens drowning
in a bag

because a knife splits
the gelatin buttons he
calls *eyes*
and the broken umbrellas
he calls *fins*.

Praise FISH whose beauty feeds us,
and praise MAN who catches FISH.
Praise also

the knife,
the interpreter.

COUNTRY SCENE

At the desk of the Lamb and Flag sits a Great Dane,
his paw grazing the bell we must touch to wake him.
He shakes himself, he jangles the coins on his neck.
We have arrived at midnight without reservations,
father, mother, son. Even our fear is asleep.

His peaked ears twitch as they gather our names.
For a long time he studies the black book
of all who have certainly stayed and all who might.
Then he asks us in low tones, why have we come?
Did the cock in the kettle crow?

Did a donkey sing?
We shake our heads, no, we heard nothing like that.
In the clock behind him, a sun is rising
like a burnished peach on a perfectly painted tree.
Behind the sun a rabbit is running away,

and behind the rabbit a pack of hounds
flushes the hours out. Eleven! Twelve!
Time passes, stately as deer on the mountain.
The Great Dane listens for yet one more.
But nothing appears, nothing has changed at all.

He waves us to follow him, he has a room that will do,
and he gives us a key fit to open nothing.
It is dotted and crossed and solid silver.
It waits on my palm like a word
that would light this whole house

if I knew how to say it.

BEING MENDED

Crouched on my mending,
my son draws unicorns.

He draws them from life,
not his own at play in

the silence of his work,
nor mine tied to my tasks

like spider woman. A stitch
in time! I am keeping myself

together. My son draws
on the back of a card marked

You have expired. Time to renew.
My son draws unicorns

as prayers draw angels.
He crumples their heads

like sad cartoons.
So do our prayers appear

to those who receive them.
In the error of his ways

I can almost see
legs slender and strong as the grass,

horns pointing gravely to the stars,
faces human but open

and humble as salt
that spends itself and vanishes.

My son lifts his crayon.
He sits very still.

I drop my sewing
and I go to meet them.

Mark Strand

LINES FOR WINTER

for Ros Krauss

Tell yourself
as it gets cold and gray falls from the air
that you will go on
walking, hearing
the same tune no matter where
you find yourself —
inside the dome of dark
or under the cracking white
of the moon's gaze in a valley of snow.
Tonight as it gets cold
tell yourself
what you know which is nothing
but the tune your bones play
as you keep going. And you will be able
for once to lie down under the small fire
of winter stars.
And if it happens that you cannot
go on or turn back
and you find yourself
where you will be at the end,
tell yourself
in that final flowing of cold through your limbs
that you love what you are.

Vasko Popa

SHADOW OF A SHEWOLF

They tell how my great grandmother
The witch Sultana Uroshevich
Used to have the shadow of a shewolf

She would never leave the house
On moonlit nights

So no one could step on her shadow
Deprive her of secret powers
And kill her instantly

They tell
That I inherited from my great grandmother
These eyes and this tongue

Whether the shadow of a wolf too
I don't know

In the moonlight
And often in the sunlight
I walk backwards

God forbid

STEPFATHER OF WOLVES

On a sled loaded
With salt and smugglers
My great grandfather Ilia Luca Morun
Flies over the Sand

The wolves howl and charge
The men and horses

The great grandfather threatens
That he'll kill anyone
Who reaches for his weapon

Instead he stands up
And howls more terrifyingly
Than all the tailed-bandits

The wolves' howl grows sadder
As they fall behind the horses
Which have suddenly sprouted wings

The more winters and snows
Separate me from my great grandfather
The clearer I hear his voice

THE OTHER WORLD

My grandmother puts cakes
With lit candles on floating planks

Whispers to them messages
For the dead men and women of our blood
And sends them down the river Karash

The planks slide down the black water
The little candles struggle through the dusk
And disappear around the turn of the river

Grandmother announces
That they have happily reached
The other world

I have already been there once
To set traps for birds

I didn't know of course
It was my ancestors I was hunting
Among the blossoming willows

BROKEN HORNS

My grandfather Milos Popa Nemac
Spoke less during his lifetime
Than a deafmute from birth does

For that reason he knew how to put his shoulders
Under a young bull
And lift him off the ground

The bull would try to dig
His four legs into the air
Would try to stick his horns into the heavens

Men stood in a circle
Threw their fur hats in the air
And crossed themselves upside down

In dreams I pray to my grandfather
To show me where I can find
The old god of our herd

Grandfather stands before me
With broken horns on his head

translated by Charles Simic

TERREMOTO: ANTIGUA 1976

It was the earth again
gathering the chips
of mica and flagstone.
Everything knelt down
a little too suddenly —
the biggest ears of corn,
the sow two feet from shade,
cigarettes rolling
from the vendor's stand
across the park, my friends
from their beds.

We had all sworn
to leave her sometime,
but came back
with our collars straightened,
our hats socked into shape.
Now I watch in awe
that Indian, Tomás,
rum stinging his veins,
who is sick of being poor
and having those small wooden boxes
left at his doorstep
like gifts that will swallow
his children.

He says the way she edged
her rocky shoulders into his place
made her look like a man.
She lifts the mirror again,
letting him have it —
the dust that he is.

Tonight, I go with the others
by lamplight to the stadium.
It is like the face
of the earth, puffy
with cotton mattresses,
wrinkled with arms and legs.
The green wash of grass
is still. With the first tremor,
the bowl rocks so quickly
that we can't sleep.
And the lullaby — a song
she sings only to herself
of how beautiful she is,
beautiful. . .

almost no one believes her.

THUNDER

I'm wondering
if I should crawl because
forty floors up looking down
they are

Now on all fours
it feels right and
almost beautiful as
the angels must

SOLVING THE WAVES

first
to see this
you must put things out
of perspective

make the sea an eye
whose lid is night whose
stare is day

make the day and night
the blink of the eye

make the blink the need
to rid it of sleep

GONE WITHOUT LEAVING AN ADDRESS

A small dog drowses on a rattan plate
and the rattan meditates on the injustice of the tribunal
which condemns the rattan without condemning the dogs
But the tribunal drowns itself in a plate of sauce
where it wanted to fish for toes
resembling full moons
and yawning like donkeys in front of a derby hat
while the women's thighs opened and closed
like an oyster that wanted to breathe the freshness of the
evening
without showing its pearl
which drinks like a bottomless pit
and all day is more drunk than a merry-go-round

And if the tribunal looks at itself in the bottom of its plate
it sees an open faucet
from which escapes the entire harvest of little peas of its host
who dies slowly like a mushroom in a boiler
where the hair of some falls out while that of others grows
which makes the horses galloping on the road whinny
before a cartload of beets
who play whist
while they wait to be allowed intimacy with the sugar
this hoodlum who makes the coffee die under a small flame
as you burn the soles of the general's feet
to force him to eat his boots
without drinking a single drop of water
which could be an over-ripe pumpkin
or a hat with feathers
or a house with a moderate rent
or a swarm of grasshoppers
or a lead mine
which is not in a knapsack

TO WASH YOUR HANDS

He put his dishes in the Gulf Stream to wash them
gilded his small loaves of bread with a ray of sunlight
and now he makes himself a belt
out of the tail that he snatched from the devil
He'd give that all up for a date at the Saint Guy dance
at the foot of a spiral staircase
which makes it rain or shine
like a little bird on the hats of worthy people
That's why I don't have a hat
That's why the lice
detest the mirrors
I make with my eyes
as the rain and the horse
have made the horse shoe
There's hardly even wallpaper for the hotel rooms
which can't make as much of anything
It's true times are hard
you might blame my tail
and not worry about the grains of sand
you find so often in grapes
That's wrong
because from them comes the Sahara desert
and some others

STALE BREAD

After having reflected deeply on the origin of acorns
the wrist will sigh
and think
Too bad that gooseberries aren't whores
there would be under the first asparagus
a little palace of Bohemian crystal
a sad tomato
which would be lost the following day in the wind
without succeeding at its suicide
and who forgetting its past as a dripping faucet
would throw itself down flat on a pair of boots
so small you would mistake them for a lump of sugar
After that the years will be able to pass like a dandelion
the toes will be able to separate from each other
like a woman who divorces
because her husband eats the legs of the night table
the muzzles would be able to hunt June bugs
in the deserts of double-bottomed trunks
All that would be in vain because the finery used for
    covering up the statue on a coffin
would tremble with fever or drunkenness
cold or fear
like some salad bowl falling from the fifth floor
on an old lightning rod

A BUNCH OF CARROTS

Blood blood and blood of the flying cod
Let it fall back on the toes of the wise
Let it recover the cascades
like phantoms
and the blood the blood of the fresh cod
floods the thin cows
which will be tires and burst
at the first puncture made by a mosquito
And their spines will be plowed
so scientifically
that the peasants will twiddle their thumbs
like shells
which will burst in the blood the blood of the flying cod
and throw it in all directions
like a tousled shock of hair

TO SLEEP STANDING UP

When the fish leave the eyes of the bride
who drools swallows
the soft part of the bread
half-mildewed half-soap
expands
and on this knotted cord hangs a small parrot
which cries like a railroad signal
It even squawls
but if it squawls it's because the telegraph
has lost at poker
meanwhile his wife was receiving the compliments
of a school of herring
Midnight or one o'clock in the morning
The Pink pills have finished their journey
and return to their cave
Forty thieves
It's a goat that has left 40 droppings
on this side of the Seine
which is an old dry loaf of bread
infested by lice
Thus in the morning when the dust tired from a night
of insomnia
stretches out at the same time as the greyhounds of the rich
the blooming chestnuts sigh after winter
which perhaps will give them famous beards
or a hanged man who will be able to be famous too
This matters little
provided that he sticks out his tongue
like a bellrope that you rip out
to the hilt

translated by Keith Hollaman

Bruce Weigl

PAINTING ON A T'ANG DYNASTY WATER VESSEL

Small girl leading a horse
Its heavy lathered thighs steaming upward
Dwarfing her at awkward angles
She is stopped
As if by some urgent recollection
Bundle of white flowers in her free hand,
Beyond her the moon before the willows,
Boat of drunken fishermen and mountains,
Green peaks on the neck
On the furthest peak
Two men trying to say good bye
One with a gift of thanks
The other gazing down the path
To his house lit by a single lamp
And his wife kneeling by the cooking
And his daughter leading a horse
Its . . . no, I've come around
This thing has turned completely around in my hands,
Someone must've meant this, —
They painted it so
When you picked it up
Hundreds of years later
You'd find the girl
Waiting for her father
On the mountains past the loud willows
In the moon.

SETTING THE TABLE

The lemon
is no heavier
than its own shadow
in this late afternoon
light. It is time
to cover the table
with the cloth, to spread
the white cloth
and watch it settle
as a bird settles its wings
over the nest
after a long
flight.

I set three places
noticing the places
I no longer set.
I arrange a still life:
napkin fork knife
and one spoon shaped
to the mouth
of the last child,
and one to the mouth
of the old woman
whose surprised face
rises
out of mine.

I believed the promise
of the lemon in bud,
and though the fruit is bitter
I will share it with you
against the time
when silver
chimes
against china,

when upon the plate's round face
one of us rests his fork
and knife for the last time —
the two stilled hands
of a clock.

THE LAST FOOD POEM

Let this be
the last food poem.
We have learned civics
from the salad
where all lettuces are equal;
fealty from the butter
cleaving to its bread.
It is time to sit
at a real table and eat,
whispering for grace
one final couplet:
raspberries
and cream.

CAMERA LUCIDA

Just before dawn, outside the window,
When we're restless
Pulling back from dreams, a pale
Glimmer arrives from nowhere, a slow
Aerial spinning above the lawns.
This is shade and foreplay, the strobe lights
Of the purposeful ghost moths. The males
With their sheen and carroty scent
Are waking the females
Who've been closed over thin
Stalks of grass all night. These females

Are dusky, ochre and red, hidden
In the dim morning. Suddenly,
They fly up
Towards that mysterious light that comes
And goes as the alternate
Dark and white sides of their partners' wings.
For us,

Drawn out of sleep or from our houses, the best
Show in town is a stranger
Dancing: a large hat slung
Across her buttocks, a white feather
Caught in the labia while a live
Canary follows down an invisible wire.
Like us, the crowd is tipped on their chairs
Somewhere between themselves
And what they see. We all see

What the body sees, in daylight
On the street or in the long grasses
Of adolescence flattened
Under cold stars; the white daisies staring
Back up beneath us. Or this:

The sound of someone dreaming
Beside you, whose hand is suddenly on you;
You accept it in sleep.
And even as the familiar
Has motion, scent and color, you have woken

As someone being discovered
In a world between worlds. Strange
Duration that tilts you back to sleep:
What the body saw when it was
No longer rising in a field of wild carrots,

Or yours to keep.

Gregory Orr

WORK GLOVES

All morning, I lug to the side
large rocks the plow turned up,
while the tractor with the disk harrow
rattles and bounces
across the field's thick furrows.

Noon. I lie on my back
on the little, mid-field island
with its single hickory tree
and watch a breeze I can't feel
stir the highest leaves.

Easing down on the porch steps
to unlace my boots, I pause;
rawhide, sun, sweat, and dirt:
I hold my face in my gloved hands
and breathe deeply.

SWAMP SONGS

for Trisha

1

I'm glad when my boots sink
deep in the ooze
and to pull loose, against the smooth
suck, I grab
thick tufts of swamp grass.

2

On a wide hummock, I kneel,
bend close, and watch my numb
forearms and hands: pale,
herbivorous dinosaurs
that yank and chew
huge mouthfuls of cress
at the bottom of an ancient lake.

3

We lie, at dusk, on the naked
bank, watching a red-winged blackbird
perch on a cattail stalk
and a muskrat paddle slowly
through weedy shallows toward its mound.

FOR PETER

A child died, and a child
was born inside me.
I thought:
if I am only the shell
around this birth, that
will be enough; if
I carry the weight of my guilt
the way a barn carries
the heaviness of snow through winter,
protecting the animals . . .
We are almost the same size now,
he and I; we have grown together,
no longer the good and the bad brother.
Our hands are the same hand,
his inside mine,
as it reaches for something.

SPRING FLOODS

Virginia, 1975

1

Later that week, when the reddish,
silt-laden water subsided,
we found a deer
high in a tree, wedged
there by the flood; its legs
outstretched as if leaping,
its neck snapped and fallen
back along its flank.
It was my dead brother;
his body lifted, held
forever in the arms
of my twelfth year.

2

And in a muddy field:
an open, empty coffin,
but only I could see it;
It was a boat my mother
sent to fetch me,
just as she sent the flood.

3

Water roiled so deeply
who could calm it,
as she did,
laying her cool hand
on my forehead
in the dark room before sleep?

GHOSTS AT HER GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

It is autumn and I can see the lake
because leaves have fallen.
The distant water becomes blue leaves
on the bare branches of oaks.

I look back at the house:
two empty armchairs on the porch.
She is sitting in one of them, and my wife
is a child in her arms.

Mark Strand

THE NEED TO CHANGE OR THE ANXIETY OF SELF-IMITATION

Often if you talk to a poet in mid-career you will hear him say that his new poems will be different, unlike anything he ever wrote before. And sometimes, when you see the new poems — if indeed there are new poems — they are different from the others. But are they substantially different? Most poets find themselves unable to suddenly change merely because they feel tired of their old work or others have told them *they* are tired of the old work. Think of what is involved. First, the sudden and arbitrary belief in a new set of formal principles and the employment of a different esthetic. Thus the person who for years was writing the old poems must become the person who will write the new poems. It is no less than a change of person that is called for. How else does one adopt a wholly different outlook? To say that you will not write the old poems any longer is to say that the principles that applied in determining the shape of those poems no longer operate. But what does operate other than the determination to write differently? The difficulties are compounded when one considers that it is not merely *the way* of saying the same old things that will be changed, but the same old things themselves that will have to be relinquished. It seems clear to me that we fashion a language around the necessity of saying certain things, that in the end those things become inextricably bound to the manner in which they are expressed — they are in fact the expression of themselves. Let me illustrate this by creating a brief, necessarily simple case history. Poet X has written several books marked by a consideration of himself in his loneliness, a loneliness for which there would seem to be no remedy, and the use of certain words like "dark," "mirror," "stone," "grass." It seems that whenever X sits down to write, one or more of those key words suggests itself and before long another dark, brooding poem is near completion. Not only has X learned to use those words, but it may be that he cannot conceive of writing a successful poem without them. Perhaps no poem of his will seem right

unless those words are in it. And the loneliness he writes about will be, in fact, the most comforting and reassuring thing he knows. That is, until he fears he is imitating himself or until he is bored by writing poems that seem variations on too narrow a theme. Before I say more about Poet X, let me say that he is not alone in his anxiety; the conditions that led to a crisis in his career can easily be substituted for others. Poet Y, for example, was a writer of fastidiously metered poems having to do with domestic life. He felt the call to write free verse about free love. Poet Z could not write a poem longer than ten lines and, fearing that he might be short on ideas as poems, went on to write long meditations on the writing of meditations.

Why isn't Poet X satisfied with his work? Well, it could be that his life has changed since he became an adept at eulogizing loneliness. Perhaps he married and even seemed to experience happiness. How difficult, then, to sit down and write verse that does not reflect at all the changes that have occurred in his life. How false he must feel when he writes about things he no longer experiences. Now you might say that one's poetry does not have to reflect one's life as it is lived among others, it should reflect one's life as it is lived internally or as it was lived in the past or, even, as one might wish to live it in future. Perhaps. But Poet X, who because he is no doubt a bit simpler than other poets, is more responsive to his immediate environment. So he sits at his desk, trying to write a poem of domestic bliss, but everything he writes strikes him as shallow or inconsequential. It could be that the earlier poetry demands it to be continued and the taste that operated in those earlier poems is asserting itself against X's desire for change. For if X can suddenly use the words "dark," "alone," "mirror," the poem begins to look more promising. These promptings from the earlier X may be entirely unconscious and usually are.

Of course, we might be entirely wrong about Poet X. Those promptings to change may have little to do with an honest attempt to square his verse with his experience and a

lot to do with what is expected of American writers, famous or not: that they change. Poet X may be using his shift of fortune as a means of dealing with this expectation. If I were more cynical I might surmise that X's change in life was cold-bloodedly accomplished to accommodate a restless muse. The pressure is great. But it is hard to isolate and say just where it comes from. Years ago, in his introduction to an anthology of contemporary American poetry, Donald Hall said of the American poet: "He has acted as if restlessness were a conviction and has destroyed his own past in order to create a future. He has said to himself, like the policeman to the vagrant, 'Keep Moving!' " This American inability to loiter in the sunshine of accomplishment, this urge to "make it new" in the words of Ezra Pound, strikes me as peculiarly Puritanical. For if a poet decides to stick with "a good thing," he will be considered self-satisfied, lazy, unworthy, decadent, and a host of other things. The judgment is usually severe and delivered self-righteously by those who most probably are secretly envious. So poet X, not wanting to meet the fate — he says — of Richard Wilbur, has decided to "keep moving." He believes his survival as a poet depends on it even though he will, as a poet, have to turn his back on his previous poems. He will tell himself, blandly justifying his determination, that no one ever stops growing. Again, it is endemically American to believe that one not only *can be* but *should be* "young at heart," that so long as we change we are young. Thus, if one begins again and again, he can remain a child perpetually. It is a belief that frees him of any sustained responsibility to himself or his past.

So Poet X wants to keep moving, but how and towards what? Clearly, to find a few new words to replace the old will not do. Maybe many new words to replace the old ones! Maybe instead of that spare, chaste style, he should now affect a chattiness, an inclusive verbosity something like John Berryman's. Poor X is overwhelmed with possibilities. Unlike his friend, Poet Y who found the move to free verse and free love invigorating and natural, X is immobilized.

Y is suddenly very prolific and claims that what one writes must be measured against what one has to say "as a person." This makes X cringe, especially since Y is convinced that one can never say enough. The domestic bliss that X wanted to celebrate does not seem compensation enough for his troubles as a poet. He becomes depressed, his wife is worried. What's happened? He feels almost like writing those old poems again, but knows he cannot. Is he washed up? Is he all written out? Is his entire contribution to American letters to be that bare handful of slim volumes? He struggles to find a solution. He goes back and reads those writers he feels influenced him when he began writing. Those were the days! How reassuring to be influenced by others! If only he could be influenced by someone other than himself! Influence! How else does one feel connected to the history of letters and how else does he combat his insecurity as a writer than by joining a tradition that precedes him by centuries? Not to be influenced is to be cut-off, isolated, directionless. But to be influenced by oneself! To exist as the one from whom you wish to be freed! A terrible state of affairs. Perhaps he is much too self-conscious. He should think less about what he is doing and just write. But how do you write without consciousness of how you are writing? X decides that he should loosen up with a few drinks before heading to his desk. The results are disastrous. Never a heavy drinker, X is drunk before getting to his desk, either falling asleep or lurching awkwardly towards his wife in chaotic and sporadic bursts of sexual exuberance. Poor X. (Poor X's wife!) His failure to write makes him worry about his job. "Will they give me tenure?" he mutters to himself. Let us leave him for a while. For he will spend the next few years in a grim repetition of the scene I have just described.

Before I became involved with the career of Poet X, I suggested that significant change in a poet's work was difficult and rarely accomplished because it would have to be accompanied by a change in the poet's identity. What I hope I didn't suggest was that not to undergo a dramatic change in

one's style or vision meant a career of self-imitation. After all, it is possible to write poems that are singular and distinct yet share characteristics. In fact, it is hard not to. But to fear what may have become a personal manner strikes me as shortsighted, and to expect change may be to misunderstand oneself. Change, however cataclysmic it may seem at the time, is diminished over the long haul. An entire career, historically speaking, occurs in an instant, and a poet's work, no matter how varied, is usually identified by a single set of characteristics. Nor is it something which seems to have obsessed as many poets as it now does in the waning of the Twentieth Century in the United States. In the past I doubt if self-imposed change was ever considered a reasonable topic of consideration. If change was claimed for a poet's career, it may be that what was meant was "development" or "refinement" or "a falling off" (a word often used to describe what happened to Wordsworth after "The Excursion"). If we examine some of our contemporary poets, we will see that in their delusions about change they resemble Poet X or else — and this is more likely — his liberated friend, Poet Y. The change is always toward greater directness, increased honesty — so they say, and freedom from the worn-out conventions of rhyme and meter.

Let's take a quick look at the career of Robert Mezey, a once famous young American poet of the late 50's who wrote wordy, sentimental poems in rhyme and meter. In 1960 or 61 he published a book of these poems called *The Lovemaker*. You wouldn't know it if you picked up his selected poems published in 1970 and called, rather invitingly, *The Door Standing Open*. For from that first volume less than half a dozen poems are included and what's more they are included in a section titled "Someone Else's poems." Has someone changed? Apparently. In his forward Mezey says:

> The five poems I have called, half seriously "someone else's poems" are from a book written almost fifteen years ago. Looking through it for something to include in this selection, I found I could hardly

> bear to read most of the poems, they were so full of the deadly and slavish atmosphere in which I first began to write poetry. At last I ended with five poems in which a real voice and real feelings had survived, though almost drowned in the verbiage and pretense of that period, and took the liberty of rewriting them thoroughly, a work that I tried to do in the spirit of a man restoring an old canvas.

Aside from the ill-chosen image of the man restoring an old canvas, this is an interesting statement in that it makes a facile distinction between poems that embody the atmosphere in which they were written and poems in which a real voice and real feelings survive. The implication is that what is received from outside is bad but what is generated from within is good. At this point I think we should take a look at what Mezey has done in the way of restorative rewriting.

Here's the first stanza of "In The Environs Of The Funeral Home" as it originally appeared:

> In the environs of the funeral home
> The smell of death was absent. All I knew
> Were flowers rioting and odors blown
> Tangible as a blossom into the face,
> To be inhaled and hushed — and where they grew
> Smothered the nostrils in the pungent grass.

and now the first stanza of the same poem as it appeared in *The Door Standing Open*:

> In the environs of the funeral home
> The smell of death was absent. All there was
> Was flowers rioting, the odors blown
> Palpable as a blossom into the face,
> To be crushed and overpowered — as if the grass
> Already covered the nostrils in that place.

There is a difference in the two stanzas but not a remarkable difference — the substitution of "palpable" for "tangible," the disappearance of the "knew-grew" rhyme, a slightly more

conversational tone. On the other hand, the diction is pretty much the same, some of the rhymes are the same, and the meter is unchanged. The biggest alteration in the poem was the dropping of a stanza. There's been a change, but the old young poet survives, even in the recent poems.

> . . . and I remember well
> the mules straining in the darkness, the bitter thin air,
> the mountain road covered with snow, the huge logs
> covered with snow,
> and summer nights in the old days,
> wild girls rising bareback over the foothills,
> sisters of rustlers, going to a dance,
> and the old Harley
> hitting a big hole and going down thrashing and
> burning in the gravel . . .

Real voice? Real feelings? Whatever the changes are they have certainly kept pace with the atmosphere in which most other American poems have been written in the last ten or fifteen years.

Mezey is not the only recent poet to have undergone a change, if that is what these slight alterations of style amount to. James Wright is another. His move from the past seems more than anything a move from metrical regularity to free verse. Early in his career he admitted to trying "very hard to write in the mode of Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost." Later on he said he wanted to write poems that "say something humanly important instead of just showing off with language." But about all that has changed in Wright's poetry is that he rarely writes in rhyme anymore. The poems themselves are otherwise clearly the work of one man. This is true of Merwin, Simpson, Kinnell, and others. The similarities between early and later work clearly outweigh the differences, although much more is made of the differences. This is true, too, of Lowell who, though he altered his style in *Life Studies*, is still recognizable as the poet of *Lord Weary's Castle*. Here's the first stanza of Part IV of "The Quaker Graveyard In Nantucket":

This is the end of the whaleroad and the whale
Who spewed Nantucket bones on the thrashed swell
And stirred the troubled waters to whirlpools
To send the Pequod packing off to hell:
This is the end of them, three-quarters fools,
Snatching at straws to sail
Seaward and seaward on the turntail whale,
Spouting out blood and water as it rolls,
Sick as a dog to these Atlantic shoals:
Clamavimus, O depths. Let the sea-gulls wail . . . etc.

And here's the first part of the first stanza from "Beyond The Alps" in *Life Studies*:

Reading how even the Swiss had thrown the sponge
in once again and Everest was still
unscaled, I watched our Paris Pullman lunge
mooning across the fallow Alpine snow.
O bella Roma! I saw our stewards go
forward on tiptoe banging on their gongs.
Life changed to landscape. Much against my will
I left the City of God where it belongs.

And more recently, the beginning of "Waterloo":

A thundercloud hung on the mantel of our summer
cottage by the owners, Miss Barnard and Mrs. Curtis:
a sad picture, half life-scale, removed and no doubt
scrapped as too English Empire for our taste:
Waterloo! Waterloo! You could choose sides then:
the British Redcoats gray. . . .

Let's return to the central issue which is why American poets feel they must justify themselves, the legitimacy of their calling and their poems by changing or manifesting in their work signs that they have advanced and will continue to do so towards the goal of bearing a new self. It is more than legitimizing, it is a way of surviving. Each change, no matter how small, calls attention to itself, each book is an advance and, as such, is a new beginning. I don't think Europeans who out of necessity live in history more painfully and more emphatically than we do, concern themselves with change as

a mode of personal survival. Change is what goes on around them. The self-centeredness, and I don't use the word pejoratively, of Americans has allowed them to internalize history to the extent that it exists more or less as a biographical phenomenon. For instance, we might say that the narcissism of Anne Sexton's poetry is the indirect result of our somehow making the destiny of each individual synonymous with the destiny of the state. People have often enough talked interchangeably about her personal agony and what they have called "the sickness of the times." But let's go back to Poet X who for a few years did not know how to change, though it was clear to him that several kinds of change were available. As I mentioned earlier, there was the possibility of trying something like Berryman's peculiar chattiness, the spirited — not to say drunken — talk of the "Dream Songs." Could X invent so eccentric a diction as Berryman's? Could he make himself into as convincing an original? After all, eccentricity of diction is one of the ways American poets try to deal with change and self-imitation. No, X could not do something for which he has so dominant a model. What about another kind of change? James Wright's? The cultivation of an aggressive honesty with apparent disregard for formal restraints. The problems of this sort of writing, especially in less skilled hands, have already been anticipated by X. Life and art begin to look the same and, of course, they are not. Art should never take as long to get through, for one thing. So what is left for X? The same as what is left for most American poets. He must not concern himself with the issues of which I have been writing. Whether he has changed or not will continue to be an issue for certain others — his critics, perhaps, but not for him.

Often when you hear a poet in mid-career say that he is going to write differently, it has to be a judgment of his previous work. To continue to write regardless of self-imitation is not only to accept what you've done but to disregard what seems to be a standard critical preoccupation with "the writer's development," as if the critic were in the best

position to judge. The wisest thing the poet can do is ignore what is written or said about his work; for the need to change is sometimes the need to please critics. This should not be, but since we still live in an age of criticism, it means that the poet will have to try even harder to please himself. Who knows — someday the natural practice of a poet's being himself will not be looked upon as mere self-imitation.

MILK WEED

Remember how unimportant
they seemed, growing loosely
in the open fields we crossed
on the way to school. We
would carve wooden swords
and slash at the luscious trunks
until the white milk started
and then flowed. Then we'd
go on to the long day after
day of the History of History
or the tables of numbers and order
as the clock slowly paid
out the moments. The windows
went dark first with rain
and then snow, and then the days,
then the years ran together and not
one mattered more than
another, and not one mattered.

Two days ago I walked
the empty woods, bent over,
crunching through oak leaves,
asking myself questions
without answers. From somewhere
a froth of seeds drifted by touched
with gold in the last light
of a lost day, going with
the wind as they always did.

DARK HEAD

Wakened suddenly by
my own voice, I know
I've said your name,
and you stir, your breath
as sweet as milk, and give
me first a hand to hold
and then your head to cradle.
How we came to be together
from the distant ends
of warring stars, how we
gave first our hearts
and then the rest, I
can't say. The night is
ending, the dawn I once
prayed for is cracking
along the eastern rim
of hills, and the first light
floods this filthy valley
of the Ohio River. Here
and there a house puts on
a light, and someone
wakens to a life as strong
as the smell of urine
in the broken cellars
of the houses I walk by
each day. Once more you
are sleeping in my arms,
the arms of a man
you don't know yet trust.
I'm alone, and more,
awake to the life
that tears us apart,
content to see the day
come on flaming window
after window. Today
I shall be gone and you

will be alone again. Today
or tomorrow I shall be fire,
then ashes, then a hint
of something animal
moving out of the corners
of the wind, and then at last
I shall be nothing, not
even the echo of someone's
voice, and then I'll be
ourselves once more,
this world, opening
in each eye and damp fist
for those who would have her.

I COULD BELIEVE

I could come to believe
almost anything, even
my soul, which is
my unlit cigar, even
the earth that huddled
all these years to
my bones, waiting
for the little of me
it would claim. I
could believe my sons
would grow into
tall lean booted men
driving cattle trucks
to Monday markets,
and my mother would
climb into the stars
hand over hand,
a woman of imagination
and stamina among
the airy spaces
of broken clouds,
and I, middle aged,
and heavy, would
buy my suits by
the dozen, vested ones,
and wear a watch chain
stretched across my
middle. Even with none
of that, alone, and
naked at the club,
laid out to be rubbed
down, I would groan
orders to a T-shirted
half wit. I came
home from Spain, bitter

and wounded, opened
a small portrait shop
in an office building
in Detroit, hired
an alcoholic camera man
and married a homely woman
good with books. It is
1943 and young girls
wait in line for
the white lights blinding
them, drop their blouses
and shoulder straps
and smile for the men
scrambling on Pacific
atolls. I have bought
a second shop
on Washington Blvd.
When I can't stand it
I drive out past the lights
of the small factories
where the bearings for tanks
and half-tracks are ground,
and park and smoke
in silence on the shoulder
of US 24, 7000 miles
from my lost Spain,
a lifetime from the Ebro
where 7 men I came to need
went under in a small boat
and I crossed alone
to a burnt shore and kept
running. Someone said
it was Prospect Park
in the summer, except
for the dying. Except

for the dying this
would be heaven and I,
37 years old, would be
a man I could talk to
or a body fallen away
to the dust of Spain,
a white face becoming
water, a name no one
names, a scramble
of sounds, hiccups
and the striking of teeth
against teeth, except
for the dying I
would be dead, my face
born forever on an
inside page of the Detroit
Free Press, except
for the dying I could
believe.

LEFT ON THE SHORE

One small hat
the shore birds prayed in,
two beached stars that pointed
the way of the wind,
three egg-shells that held
three sullen planets.
I came upon all this
in the first of middle age
and passed right by
so wise had I grown
in the forty years that turned
my head gray and my
feet flat, so full was I
of schemes for making water
out of ordinary seas
and something of myself.
The wind blew down
my shirt and up my pants,
the sea raged and boiled,
it was late in the year,
too late to be out for fun.
And there I was, going
nowhere and seeing nothing
while the birds bowed their heads
all at one time
and two hands told the wind
where and how hard
and the earth and its pale sisters
looked upon everything
for the first and the last time.

TRAVELLING MUSIC

for my brother

The suitcase is weary of being used, of hiding your clothes and all their dusts and waters. Of holding so many appointments, so many bruises, so many cartridges and feathers. It has fallen open on the bed you told it to ignore. There's the pencil you wrote no one with, the paper your lies bled into, the boot without a brother, the sock without a foot, even the rag bearing your three colors for everyone to see.

A man who rides a horse is still a man. Sooner or later he will have to dismount. He will have to eat. Bowing his head before the plate, breaking the piece of bread, reaching for water or wine, he will be shorter than you. Later he may even talk too much and have to sleep. If you put your ear to his heart you will hear the beating of hooves, the rolling of the earth, waves crashing on a far shore.

Once you bite into the piece of bread it can never be whole again. You can put it on the altar and go away for a lifetime. When you come back it may be alive with ants or the color of earth or surrounded by roses. One corner may be tipped with wine the way a white cheek purples in winter. The little dark seeds of its crust will bear nothing except rage or more hunger.

You come into your room and hang your jacket on the door. It smells of work, the leather has swallowed so much grease, so much salt, so many hours when the clock wouldn't move. But now it dozes. You roll up your sleeves and run water into the sink. The harsh green soap, the little black brush, the warm water, they take away the dust, the chips of salt, the slivers of metal. The dirt is you. There's no towel. You shake off your hands. You reach for the coat.

PLANTING

A soldier runs home
and finds his mother has turned
to iron and the pots are gone.
He finds a small note
from the mice — they took
the silver and won't be back.
How can he return, how
can he march to war
knowing his mother may fall
from the clouds or before that
he may begin to laugh
at nothing and go on laughing
until he grows as tall
as the wayside trees.
He knows he is hungry
and alone. War will do nothing
for him. He knows
each house has gathered
its stories of dust and hurt
and waits under the sycamores
for fire to free it. He knows
it is foolish to be marching
away as long as one cloud
carries the sea back to land.
So he writes a letter
to the year and explains
how he was meant to make
something else, a ball
of earth out of his ears
or music from his wishbone
or a perfect watercolor
from the sparrow's tears, he
was meant to grow small
and still, a window

on the world, a map
that can show him home.
He goes out to the fields
and plants it word by word,
hurling it into the wind
and feels it come back, soft,
burning, heavy with rain.

Sandra McPherson

SENILITY

We cannot remember any fatigue of beautiful things, bee songs in the hives, the gray path-end atop hard Mt. Whitney, the steady Indians stopping in our kitchens while a corpse creaked in their dray.
We forget the sweat soaking our view of the borax caravans, perspiration on our shell at a husband's burial, the stained gussets of tiny dresses
from when people, of neglect, did not grow so high and the grandfather of rats walked us thin by eating our grain and our saddles.

Tell us your name again.

But those things are what we remember best perhaps because nothing that happens at Bea's Sanitarium rushes to replace them.
We may have given you your names, but these days they tell us our hummingbirds that died this fall were really columbine, and the bluejay faithful to the apple tree
was a piece of sky. What is your name again? God knows how we remember Bea's, except in some way we belong to Bea, are not your mothers anymore.

Never forget whose child you are.

We remember the time, ploughing, we found the children of the earthquake: minds had been planted in our farm, memories had réfused
and only let the hay grow tall. And whose children were they? And why didn't their names survive?
They belonged to the sunset flowers and the morning shadow of the mountain, free of eternal questions. But you, dearie, what was your name? —

you are the person suffering with the answers.

THE MOUSE

Two have frozen; one — a misfortune —
broke its back; two more ate poison
too soon to reach safety in the live trap;
three were let out in soft yellow weeds.

Bulldozers came. And now this nineteenth
mouse shakes and drums its rhubarb-
spider feet and backs away.
I give it goat cheese and anise cake

to have good memories. "The dark mice
of my past," says Vittorini,
"overran me." And he boarded the long train
to the island of his mother.

Mother's island was a chair, mother's island
was silence inside the plasmic sound
of a mouse. Mother's island had hibiscus,
orange, palm, it was a beautiful place.

And the small meats of their bodies ate seeds —
but not enough so there was any vacant
patch of ground. Up through the space of fear
grew wheat, comb-honey, sunflowers, oaks.

And like the mouse she showed great courage
when she entered the hospital to die
then didn't die and even began to eat.
She thought of heaven, and other scenic places . . .

Now she comes home. The earth is strung and tied
with cold-faded grass. Squirrels flock
and smarten in the short sunlight.
The owl appears by day. She fears forgetting.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON CATS GROWING ON TREES

Once upon a time, when moles still held their big conferences,
and when they had better eyesight than they do now, the
moles decided to find out just what was upstairs.
They elected a committee to supervise the project. This
committee
sent up a quick and clever mole who, when he left the
motherland underground, spotted a bird sitting on a tree.
A theory was therefore established; upstairs birds are
growing on trees.
But some moles considered this too simple. So they sent
another mole up to learn more about birds growing on
trees.
This time it was evening, and on the trees were squealing cats.
Not birds, but squealing cats are growing on trees,
announced
this mole. A theory was therefore established about cats.

The two contradicting theories made it impossible for one
neurotic
member of the committee to fall asleep. He climbed
up to see
for himself. But again it was night, and pitch dark at
that.
Nobody was right, announced the worthy mole. Birds and
cats are
optical illusions, which are evoked by the double
refraction
of light. Actually, he said, upstairs is nothing different
from down here, only the earth is thinner and the roots on
the other side are whispering something, really quietly.
They approved this theory.

Since then, the moles have stayed underground, without
establishing
any committees, and they don't believe in cats, or believe
only a little.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON LOGIC

Point of fact — the real problem is, that everything has its own logic. Everything you can think of, everything around you.

If something falls on your head, even that has its own logic, or will have — either on your head or in it.

Even a cylinder has its own logic, maybe just because it's not a cube.

Even a crack has its own logic, maybe just because it's not a mountain.

The cylinder has a special logic, trying to convince you that it's the cube, and the crack, thinking, it's the mountain.

The logic of these subjects is just basically, that they are taking

logic out of other things.

This brief thought isn't abstract. I had this idea while I was studying our history.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON COWS

We believe, that a cow's mission in life is to be a cow.
That isn't really too difficult, when we're in the pasture.
The problems start on the way to the slaughterhouse. Now we
feel unknown fear, and the devils of the deep are tearing
at our stomach, fat heart and pulp emptiness of our brain.
Then we're kicking around, our head jerked by chains:
the name
different for all of us. Or standing in deep thought, which
some may call resignation, sullenness or mental
darkness.

Old wisdom is dumb — without any directions on how to
escape from
the sledge hammer and hatchet.

So we're sorry to be a cow, with so little knowledge about
everything
in this field. We want to be in somebody else's skin now.
In a human being's skin. But this is just cow's thinking.

Even people often think — why aren't I somebody else, who
knows how to escape.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON LAUGHTER

While laughing, we open our mouth from ear to ear, or approximately
in that line. Grin, and our teeth show an expression identical
to that of ancient times when laughter was a proud demonstration
of victory.
We are vibrating our vocal chords, incidentally touching our
forehead, or the back of our head, or shaking our hands,
or hitting our legs with hands again like another time,
when winners needed fast legs to win.
We're usually laughing when we're happy.
We're occasionally laughing when we're not happy.
We're laughing, because it's allowed, and we're even laughing when it's not allowed.
So we're laughing all the time, partly because we want to disguise
the laughter of somebody else, who is laughing at us.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON THE INSECT

The insect is really not built too well. It should have a better
skeleton, a better respiratory system and better nerves
than
a couple of stupid knots in its brain. If all this happens,
then
beetle "undertakers" can start public funeral services and
make big money, the scarab can rob banks, ants could be
assigned to the space program and flies could supervise
the
whole world with big eyes, and make decisions:
yes or no
this is good, this is bad
this one will be honored, the other punished.

But it didn't work out.
One little swing of a tail, or a spray of DDT and the insect
is finished.
Yet, sometimes it feels like, somewhere, some flies are lurking,
and they know
know more.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON GARGOYLES

When the world was turning to stone
cliffs grew out of diatoms, towns became sights and
directives arose out of question-marks.

When the world was turning to stone the angels living
in mansard portals, behind cornices and
steeples, stiffened into stale
sulphuric devils. Gripping ledges with tight claws
they became gargoyles.

Now,
they shoot off their mouths at passers-by:
What are you looking at, you owl!
or:
You're dust, nothing but dust,
or:
Get outta here, go watch for gravity!

When it rains they pour out their hate in streams of water,
shivering with delight and disrespect. At night they
lick the ground with pulpy tongues making black white
and
white black.

In the spring, they're ashamed sometimes,
so they drop down, disguised as black cats and
moonstruck marmots and
peevishly criticize the gothic in general and
gargoyles in particular. Curious angels
(angels without portfolio) descend
and listen, gripping the ledge
with their tight claws. And so they harden,
turning to sulphuric stone.

This insures
the continuity of gargoyles,
the consistency of gothic fronts
and the respect of passers-by, cats and marmots
for gravity.

translated by Clifford Guren

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON AN OLD WOMAN AND A PUSHCART

Given: an old woman and a pushcart P.
Now you have a system of an old woman W and a pushcart P.

The system is moving from B the backyard to C the corner,
    from the corner C to R the rock, from the rock R
    to F the forest, from the forest F to H the horizon.

The horizon H is the point where vision ends
    and memory begins.

Nonetheless the system is moving
    at a constant rate
    along a constant trajectory
    through a constant world and
    with a constant destiny
renewing its impulse and its sense from itself.

It's a relatively independent system;
in the regions from horizon to horizon
there's always one old woman with a pushcart.

So there's one geodesic unit once and for all.
    The unit of a journey there and back
    of autumn
    of our daily bread
    the unit of wind and low hanging sky
    of home in the distance
    of our forgiveness
    the unit of dusk
    of footprints and dust
    the unit of life's fulfillment amen.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON BRIEF MEDITATIONS

Brief meditations are indeed brief meditations. Accordingly, they are not poems; neither feuilletons nor cursives; neither sketches nor editorials. While poetry is for the most part about itself, brief meditations are really about something else. While poetry is based on the image, and proceeds through the image these meditations are based on terms, and observe subtle, more or less logical associations unwinding from the starting point. While a poem is or should be a unique and supreme feat, these meditations are rather a deliberate sample of stereotypes which one nurses in one's nucleic acids. If then, meditations occasionally take form through something similar to verse, this is only so because verse approximates simple speech more than prose does. Poetry can be written on school notebooks, on tree bark, on clouds, and on the pavement of preferably one-way streets. These meditations, however, were written only on and in newspapers. Occasionally in magazines. If nevertheless they give rise to the fact and the sin of literature, it is perhaps possible to accept them as such. After all, as Ezra Pound said, literature is news that stays news.

The pike

gave up the ghost

but

its teeth

remained

says the wisdom of folklore. Brief meditations are to poetry what applied research is to pure science. Brief meditations are to life what gloom is to gaiety. And so much by way of introduction, since I value poetry, pure science, and gaiety too much.

translated by Liza Tucker, with Michael Kraus

Norman Dubie

THE INFANT:

There are possibilities for me, but under
what stone, Father, do they lie?

—Kafka

Franz, under what stone. *You ask me under what stone?*
Knowing you, I would say — under *your* gravestone,
in Prague.

You say that you can't write and yet at night you scribble
Until the light. You use paper like the successful bureaucrat

That you are. Vice Secretary of the Workers' Accident
Institute. And yet you insist that there is nothing

In this world you can do. You hate the grandchildren,
Their noises frighten you.

You write poor Felice and say that now you are in love
With another. It was a perfect setting for a romance,

The sanatorium in Riva! After troubling Felice with a rival,
And in the very same letter, you suddenly tell her

That you are on your knees, and will *she* be your wife.
You hurt her with silence. You hurt her when you write.

Martin Buber bores you.
Oklahoma bores you. Moses bores you.

Dead flowers on your desk excite you.
Rain excites you. And your sister's lacerated leg is all you'll

Hear of at the breakfast table!
Grete Bloch insists that we should grant your wish to live

In the woods with ghosts. Go! Then, will you? I'll throw
the
Latch back on our door myself for you. I'll carry you

To the woods. You love to lie on your mother's sofa
With a headache. When your sister bakes, you wait for her

Shout, and then you run down to us in glee to see a burn
Wrapped in stinging leaves.

Under stones, indeed; with the snakes, worms and darning-fleas.
Yes, even for you there are possibilities.

Your disease is your desire
Not to be.

In the mousy darkness only the thought of cows
Keeps you from madness.

Your mother wishes you would help us with the coal bill.
I laughed. The truck driver laughed.

I look back to ask what I did wrong. What I hear
Is myself with you in my arms. When you were a baby

In your long grey gowns I sang to you the best songs.
I loved the one about the three-legged mule. And the

One where a giant sat on a toadstool.
You love the cat.

You watch it at its milk and then
Follow it to its box of sand. She arches her back.

And you make notes. You write that, at that moment,
you have
No worries. What that vicious cat leaves in its box

You place in your novels — the undigested bones and tails
Of mice.

You, at your job, are so cold to the husky laborer who
Has a broken arm. But let the debtor, pensioner, whore

Come sobbing to you and you in tears respond, "Oh, isn't
It awful what happens to the weak and wronged."

You say that you can't deplore your selfishness, your
Silence, hypochondria and tears for they're the reflection

Of a higher consciousness that is impossible to understand.
To fear. Franz,

Don't lie. It's not under your gravestone that the possibilities
Lie, but here under mine. *And I survived you*!

Your mother and I today visited
Your grave at Strašnice. There was a black little acre

Beyond your grave off in the distance. Probably a potato
field.
I made these words.

I'm not ashamed. *I will go off to eat*
A large sandwich. Then, I will wash my feet.

NORMAN DUBIE's **The Illustrations** is just out from Braziller. This year he received the Bess Hokin Award from **Poetry**, and a Guggenheim fellowship. He reports that he has finished his fourth book, **The City of the Olesha Fruit**.

GREG FORKER is an inmate at the Arizona State Prison. His first book of poems will appear soon from Desert First Works Press, Tuscon.

MIROSLAV HOLUB, the distinguished Czech poet, has appeared previously in FIELD, and we welcome him back with his unique "short meditations." His translators, CLIFF GUREN and LIZA TUCKER, are Oberlin students.

LAURA JENSEN lives and works in Tacoma, Washington, and her admirers are legion among discriminating readers of contemporary American poetry. Her first collection, **Anxiety and Ashes**, was published by Penumbra Press of Lisbon, Iowa, and her next is due from Ecco Press in the fall.

RUTGER KOPLAND is the pseudonym of a Dutch poet who was born in 1934 and who has published five books of poetry, most recently **Een lege plek om te blijven (An empty place to stay)**, 1975. His translator, RIA LEIGHLOOHUIZEN, was born in the Netherlands, has published translations from a number of Dutch poets, and lives in San Francisco.

PHILIP LEVINE's latest book is **The Names of the Lost** (Atheneum). He is traveling in Europe this spring.

SANDRA McPHERSON, another FIELD regular, has been enjoying a Guggenheim fellowship in Portland this year. She writes that her third collection of poems, as yet untitled, will be published by Ecco Press next spring.

GREGORY ORR will take a leave next year from the Department of English at the University of Virginia, and will spend it in New York City completing work on a new book, thanks in part to the Guggenheim Foundation.

LINDA PASTAN writes: "My new book, **The 5 Stages of Grief**, will be published by Norton in January. A chapbook, **Setting the Table**, is due from Dryad sometime in '78."

This is the second time we have had a selection of poems by the great French surrealist, BENJAMIN PÉRET, capably translated by KEITH HOLLAMAN, a former Oberlin student.

In 1975 VASKO POPA published three collections of poetry. The poems in this issue are from a volume entitled **Raw Flesh.** CHARLES SIMIC, Popa's distinguished American translator, is valiantly keeping up with him, and will publish a collection of translations of Popa's recent work next year with the New Rivers Press.

RAINER MARIA RILKE's "The Raising of Lazarus" is dated 1913, and is therefore contemporary with the sequence, **The Life of Mary,** which FIELD published last year, also translated by FRANZ WRIGHT. That sequence is due to be published by Middle Earth Books, in Wright's translation, before very long.

PETER SEARS is living and writing in Corrales, New Mexico.

ROBERTA SPEAR lives in Fresno, California. Her poems were included in **The American Poetry Anthology**.

PAMELA STEWART's first book of poems will be published this summer by L'Epervier Press. It is titled **The St. Vlas Elegies**.

MARK STRAND is completing new books of both poetry and prose. This spring he will hold a three month fellowship in Australia.

BRUCE WEIGL edits a magazine called **Pocket Pal** and publishes a distinguished series of chapbooks. His own chapbooks, **A Sack Full of Old Quarrels** and **The Executioner on Holiday**, have been published by Cleveland State Poetry Center and Ironwood Press, respectively.

NANCY WILLARD has been enjoying an NEA grant this year, and is expecting her next children's book, **Simple Pictures Are Best**, from Harcourt Brace momentarily.

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